COUNTRY CARRIERS

IN THE BRISTOL REGION IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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This is the sixty-fourth pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. Its author, Dr Kenneth Morgan, is a lecturer in the West London Institute of Higher Education. He is an expert on the trade between Bristol and America in the eighteenth century, but in this pamphlet he turns his attention to another aspect of Bristol's history – the role of the country carriers who for nearly three centuries operated between the city and the surrounding villages and who were at their most numerous at the end of the nineteenth century. The role of the carrier in English economic and social life is now being increasingly appreciated by historians.

The illustration on the front cover has been reproduced by kind permission of Mr Reece Winstone from his *Bristol in the 1890s*. It shows Edward Adams' omnibus which ran from the *Full Moon* in Bristol to Pilning and New Passage.

The photograph of the Bristol, Wraxall and Nailsea carrier was supplied by Mrs Margaret Thomas. It appeared in her *Book of Nailsea* (Buckingham, 1984) and thanks are due to her and to the Nailsea and District Local History Society.

The photograph of the Yatton carrier was kindly supplied by Mrs Sylvia Starr of Bedminster.

The map in the centre showing the routes of the carriers was made by Miss Sue Olliver, cartographer at the West London Institute of Higher Education.

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A list of pamphlets in print is given on the inside back cover. The pamphlets may be obtained from most Bristol bookshops, from the shop in the City Museum, from the Porter's Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building, or direct from Mr Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, BS9 2DG.

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One of the characteristic features of the Bristol region in the nineteenth century was the existence of a widespread network of carriers' routes. Short- and long-distance carriers by road became significant throughout England during the eighteenth century.[1] The emergence of the railway in the 1830s rapidly led to the demise of many long-distance men, but the number and services of village carriers increased in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such local tradesmen complemented the railway network by transporting passengers and goods between towns and villages in their hinterlands. By 1881 there were probably 20–25,000 country carriers in England and extensive carrying services in and around provincial towns such as Guildford, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Maidstone, Norwich and Bristol itself.[2] Bristol, with a population of 339,150 in 1901, was the seventh largest city in

1. G.L. Turnbull, 'Provincial Road Carrying in England in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Transport History*, new series, IV (1977), pp. 17–39.
2. Alan Everitt, 'Country Carriers in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Transport History*, new series, III (1976), pp. 179–182, 186, 189. Census figures for the total number of carriers in England and Wales, 1851–1901, are given in J.A. Chartres, 'Country Tradesmen', in G.E. Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside*, 2 vols. (London, 1981), 1, p. 301. For case studies of village carriers see Alan Everitt, 'Town and Country in Victorian Leicestershire: the Role of the Village Carrier', in Alan Everitt, ed., *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1973), pp. 213–240; Alan Greening, 'Nineteenth-Century Country Carriers in North Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, LXVI (1971), Part B, pp. 162–176; Susan Cracknell, 'Nottinghamshire Country Carriers in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, LXXXVIII (1984), pp. 76–88.

England.[3] It was also a large port, a market centre, an industrial city, a metropolis for the West of England, and one of the most important focal points for village carriers in the entire country.

Bristolians at the turn of the present century would have been familiar with seeing carriers' carts amidst the brakes, cabs, carriages, hansoms, landaus, trams and other horse-drawn vehicles which were an everyday feature of urban life.[4] The vans used by carriers varied in size and type, but they often had a flat roof with wooden rails so that goods could be placed on top if the inside was full. They usually had two large wheels at the rear and two smaller ones at the front, and were pulled by one or two horses. The rows of horses and vans leaving some of Bristol's main inns – used by carriers as their stations in town – must have been an impressive sight when such traffic was at its height in the 1890s. The purpose of this pamphlet is to deploy information from local directories for 1897 plus oral recollections to show how these tradesmen fitted into the 'horse-drawn society' and market structure of late Victorian England.[5] My discussion examines the functions of village carriers in the Bristol region, the extent of their catchment area, the weekly operation of their trade, and the chief features of both the carrying inns and the carriers themselves.

Country carriers in the nineteenth century had four main functions: the dispatch of goods from urban railheads to rural destinations; the conveyance of agricultural produce for sale to urban provision merchants; the purchase of retail goods in town for local villagers; and the carriage of passengers between town and countryside.[6] Various degrees of emphasis were given to each of these activities in the Bristol region. The first function reveals a mixed picture: some Bristol carriers visited inns near Temple Meads station and the Great Western Railway goods and parcels office in Thomas Street, and it was therefore easy for them to collect packages for village customers.[7] But it is doubtful whether all carriers undertook this task for at least a quarter of the villages linked to Bristol by carrier in the 1890s had stations associated with either the Midland Railway or the Great Western Railway.[8]

3. H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870–1914* (London, 1976), pp. 19, 31. This population figure covers the ancient city plus the area added in the boundary changes of 1895, 1897 and 1904.
4. For a splendid photographic record of these vehicles see Reece Winstone, *Bristol As It Was, 1845–1900* (Bristol, 1983).
5. The phrase quoted here is taken from F.M.L. Thompson, *Victorian England: the Horse-Drawn Society* (London, 1970).
6. Everitt, 'Country Carriers in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 181–184.
7. Kelly's *Directory of the Counties of Somerset and Gloucester, with the City of Bristol* (1897), Bristol section, p. 110; *ex inf.* Mr. F. Williams of Northville, Bristol.
8. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Somerset and Glos. sections, *passim*.

NLHS. 8- THE NAILSEA-BRISTOL CARRIER AT WRAXALL (c1870)

By courtesy of Mrs Margaret Thomas and the Nailsea and District Local History Society

These companies often transported parcels and provided horses and trolleys at country stations to distribute goods. In addition, some villagers made their own arrangements for collecting consignments from stations.[9] From Chipping Sodbury, for instance, there was an omnibus travelling to nearby Yate station to meet every train.[10] Thus some carriers took parcels from railheads in Bristol to nearby villages while others probably did not because of alternative facilities being available.

Turning to the second function of carriers, it is clear that some of these tradesmen did not take many provisions from the hinterland into Bristol. One of the carriers from Pill around 1900 fell into this category; instead of loading farm commodities, he packed his van with casks for delivery to Bristol brewers.[11] Nevertheless, many carriers did convey poultry, game, rabbits, eggs, fruit, vegetables and other sorts of country produce for sale to provision merchants and urban tradesmen.[12] There were several markets held on different weekdays in late Victorian Bristol, including those for fruit and greengrocery, corn, fish, cattle, pigs, hay, straw and provisions. There was also a Gloucestershire market on the south front of the Exchange and a Somerset market on the west of the Exchange, both within reasonable distance of the main carrying inns.[13] It has been suggested that the spread of Bristol carriers' services throughout the whole week (something examined below) made the retail markets there of little importance to country people in the locality.[14] On the contrary, though, it was partly the existence of urban markets on different weekdays that encouraged the continuous provision of carrying services in this region: sending an empty cart to the city was bad business.

All carriers were engaged in a third role as shopping agents in Bristol where they picked up cotton and haberdashery garments, fine gold dust tea, hardware, parcels of tobacco, fish packed in ice, biscuits, bananas and various groceries: a whole range of food, clothing and household items that were more readily available, and sometimes more cheaply, than in village shops.[15] Several carriers' inns were situated in Old Market Street and Thomas Street, which were hives of shopping activity in the 1890s. These thoroughfares were chock-full of clothiers, watchmakers, grocers,

9. *Ex inf.* Mr. F.G. Hopkins of Thornbury.
10. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Glos. section, p. 107.
11. *Ex inf.* Mr. E.W. Jefferies of Pill.
12. *Ex inf.* Mr. Williams.
13. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, p. 13.
14. Everitt, 'Country Carriers in the Nineteenth Century', p. 192.
15. *Ex inf.* Mr. Williams; Mr. H. Brown of Bristol; and my grandmother, Mrs. G.L. Morgan of Frenchay.

tobacconists, confectioners, hosiers, provision dealers and many other shops able to provide sundry articles for villagers' needs.[16] Some carriers waited for packages to be delivered to their inns and did not normally scurry around shops to collect orders.[17] But others made a positive effort to assemble cargoes by asking timber merchants (say) or builders' merchants about consignments for their routes.[18] It was common for these and other businesses in Bristol to send packages via local carriers.[19] Thus fine tailoring firms in and around Old Market regularly sent clothing materials by carrier to seamstresses and tailoresses in Winterbourne and Watley's End. The material was used to make waistcoats and jackets and the finished garments were sent back to Bristol, by carrier once again.[20] The carriers charged for delivering shopping items according to the size of packages; in most cases the amount lay between a few pence and a couple of shillings.[21]

As for conveyance of people – the fourth function of carriers – by 1897 eight men are listed in local directories as operating passenger services between Bristol and villages in South Gloucestershire.[22] A good many of the vehicles used were just the normal cart or van; some were brakes with benches and ribbed canopies; others were rudimentary country buses. By 1899 Edward Adams was running a bus he had specially built for passengers, with room for eight people inside and six outside.[23] He operated this service three days a week from the Full Moon Inn in North Street to Westbury-on-Trym, Pilning and Redwick.[24] There were few country buses in the 1890s so it is not surprising that some carriers from the Mendips were also taking passengers to and from Bristol by the late nineteenth century.[25] George Selway Smith noted in 1884 that, after a day trip to Bristol, he walked to Redcliff Hill 'where the carrier to Blagdon starts from the Hope and Anchor and when I arrived there I found he was crowded, so I had to go on part of the way with the carrier to Ubley . . . at Winford I left the Ubley van and walked about two miles on the road. I then rode on to Blagdon in Carpenter's van, this time riding inside'.[26] Lack of space for travellers also caused problems

16. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 83, 109–110.
17. *Ex inf.* Mr. Jefferies and Mr. Brown.
18. *Ex inf.* Mr. Williams.
19. *Ex inf.* Mr. Brown.
20. *Ex inf.* Mrs. Morgan.
21. *Ex inf.* Mr. H.A. Cohen of Eastville, Bristol and Mr. Hopkins.
22. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, p. 436.
23. Reece Winstone, *Bristol in the 1890s* (Bristol, 1960), illustration no. 180.
24. J. Wright & Co's. Mathews' *Bristol Directory* (1897), p. 673.
25. *Ex inf.* Mr. Jefferies.
26. *Ex inf.* Mr. E.S. Smith of Nailsea. This quotation is taken from the diary of Mr. Smith's father.

elsewhere in the Bristol region, for people from Rudgeway had to forfeit their day's expedition if the carrier's vehicle was full when it arrived at their village from Alveston en route for Bristol.[27] The charges made for carrying passengers were modest: a service running between Winterbourne and Bristol in 1909 charged return fares of sixpence for adults and half price for children.[28]

How extensive was the catchment area served by Bristol country carriers? These tradesmen were in contact with a largely agricultural hinterland covering about 273,000 acres and a shopping population amounting to approximately 110,000 people in South Gloucestershire and 51,000 in North Somerset. Nearly all the villages served were within twenty miles of the city. The limits of the carriers' routes were places such as Oldbury-upon-Severn and New Berkeley to the north of Bristol; Cirencester and Malmesbury to the north-east; Dyrham and Marshfield to the east; Camerton and Farrington Gurney to the south-east; Cheddar and Chewton Mendip to the south; Banwell and Winscombe to the south-west; and Clevedon and Portishead to the west.[29] Many routes stretched almost to the boundaries of the modern county of Avon. On the eastern side of Bristol some hamlets were also connected by carrier to Bath.[30] Further north than the southern fringe of the Cotswolds lay places linked by carrier to Gloucester, Stroud and Cheltenham.[31] Further south than the Mendips lay villages visited by carriers from Bridgwater, Taunton, Frome, Shepton Mallet and Weston-super-Mare.[32]

In 1897 some 93 carriers from Bristol operated 344 services to 132 places, making 1,076 calls or scheduled stops per week.[33] This was certainly an extensive network of services. Alan Everitt, in reconstructing the activities of carriers around forty English towns, found that only Maidstone, Ipswich and Leicester had carriers making more than a thousand calls per week in the late nineteenth century.[34] As noted above, the existence of urban markets on each weekday helped to promote daily carrying services in the Bristol area. Thus Bristol had fewer carriers than some market centres but

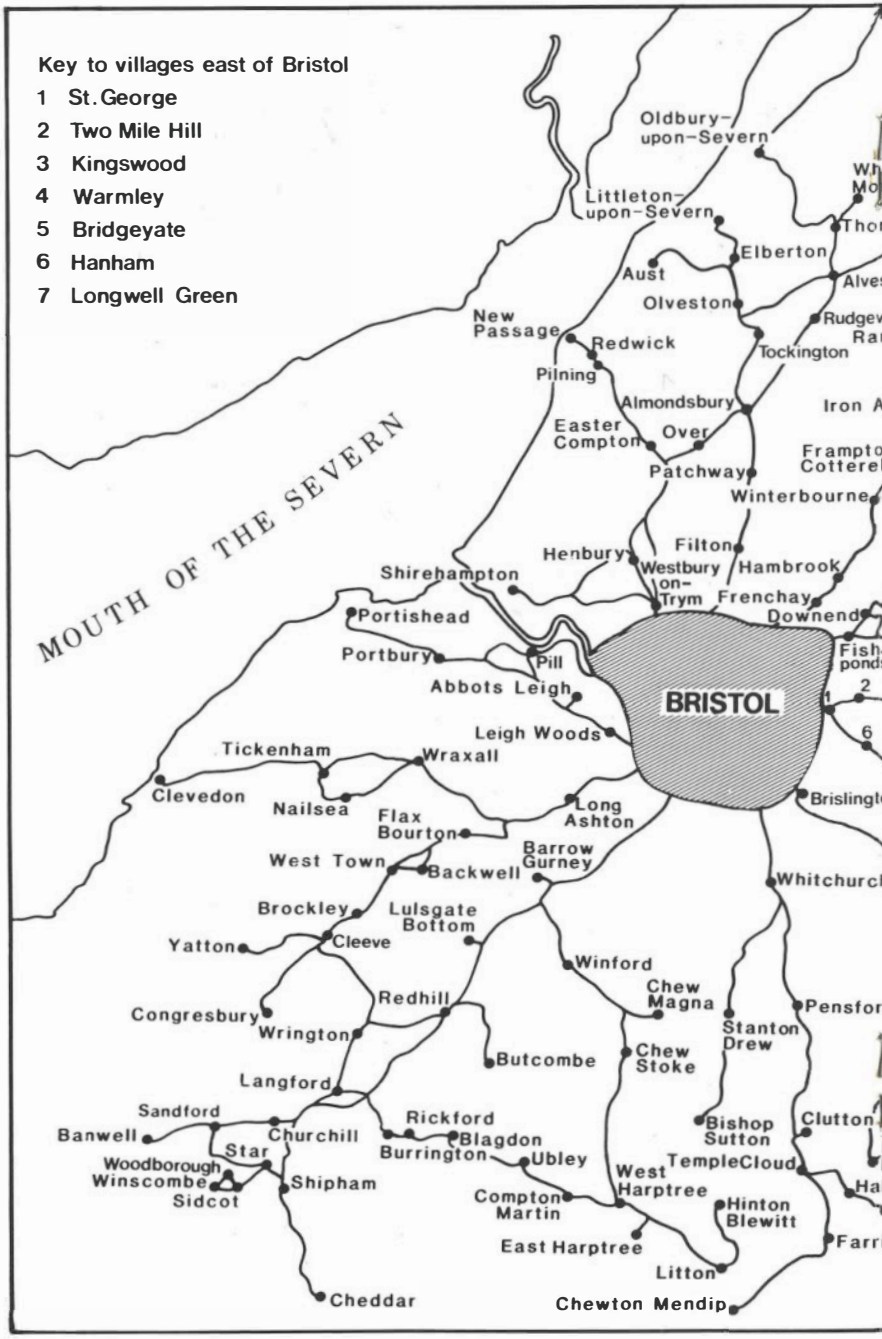
27. C. Cunnington, ed., *Alveston: Our Village within Living Memory* (1959), pp. 89–90.
28. *Ex. inf.* Mr. Cohen.
29. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Glos. and Somerset sections, *passim*.
30. *Ibid.*, Somerset section, pp. 55–56.
31. *Ibid.*, Glos. section, pp. 70, 179, 308.
32. *Ibid.*, Somerset section, pp. 140–141, 252, 370, 402, 460.
33. *Ibid.*, Bristol section, pp. 436–438 checked with village entries for all sections of the directory. The numbers were revised upwards by adding details not given in Kelly's *Directory* (1897) but noted in Wright's *Directory* (1897), pp. 671–673.
34. Everitt, 'Country Carriers in the Nineteenth Century', p. 189.

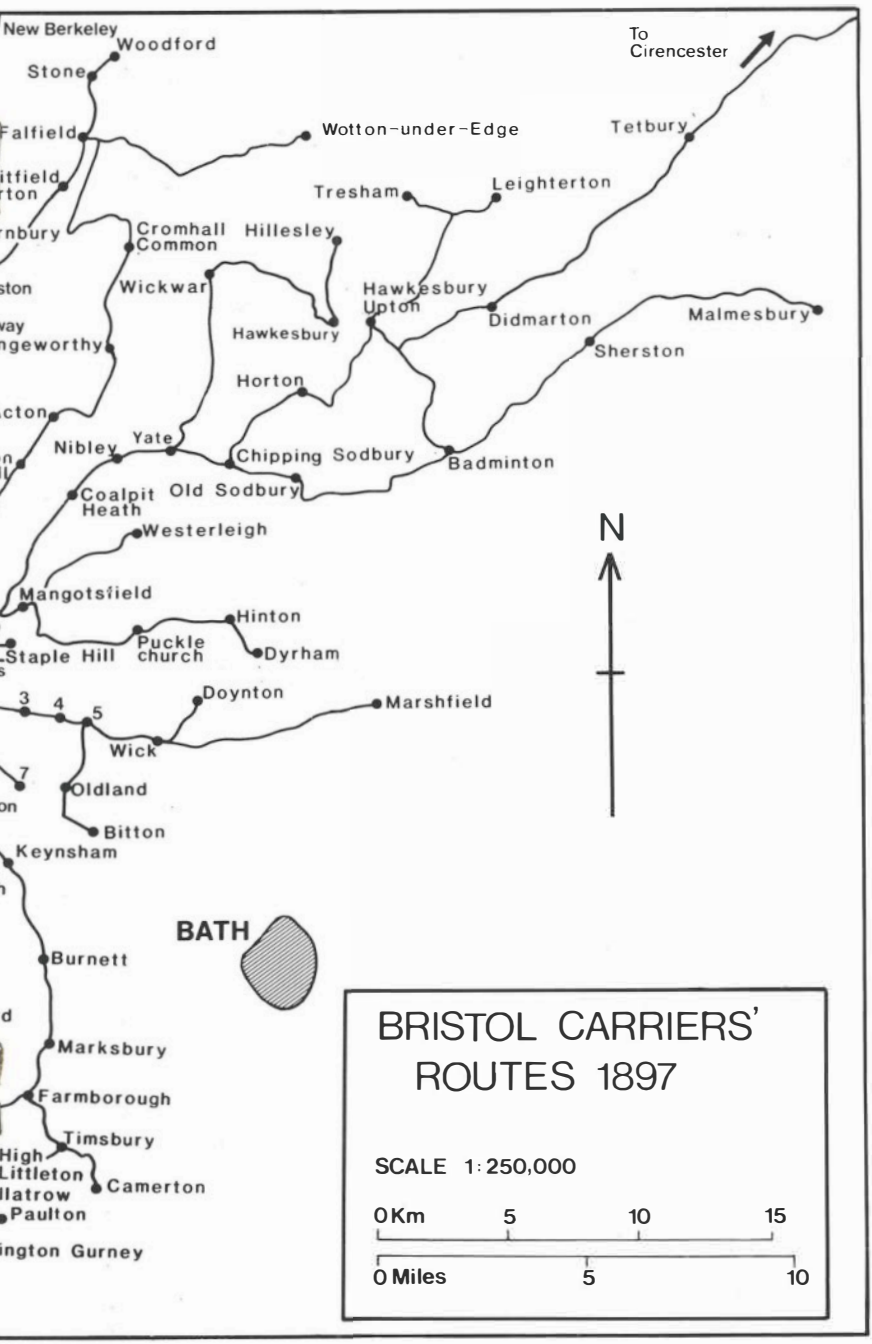
offered more regular services: forty-seven services ran on Monday, sixty-nine on Tuesday, thirty-nine on Wednesday, sixty-seven on Thursday, fifty-seven on Friday and sixty-five on Saturday. Sixty-three per cent of the Bristol carriers in 1897 worked on at least three days each week while a further 30 per cent worked every day.[35] A higher proportion of Bristol carriers operated throughout the week than their counterparts in the Leicester and Nottingham regions, where carriers' services were tied to one or two traditional market days in the week.[36]

Forty-one out of the 132 villages served by Bristol carriers in 1897 received ten or more weekly calls.[37] These places were usually within a five mile radius of the city and are now suburbs. Thus there were thirty-five weekly calls at Downend (5,219 inhabitants); twenty-four each at Hanham (1,925 people) and Pill (1,725); and twenty-two at Westbury-on-Trym (4,450).[38] The proximity of these villages to the city meant that some carriers could offer two daily services. On every weekday, for instance, Selina Turvey left Downend for Staple Hill and Bristol at 10 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. and James Farr began journeys from Bristol to Westbury-on-Trym, Henbury and Shirehampton at 11.15 a.m. and 4 p.m.[39] Frequency of service did not necessarily depend, however, on the size of a place or its nearness to the city. Villages such as Flax Bourton (211 inhabitants) and Cleeve (336), five and nine miles south-west of Bristol, both received twenty weekly calls. This was probably because they were situated on the most heavily used route by carriers travelling into North Somerset. But in general small villages had only one weekly visit from Bristol carriers; amongst these were Doynton (365 people), Stone (262) and Hinton Blewitt (176). Two larger places – Tetbury and Cirencester – were linked just once a week to Bristol by carrier; but they fell within the orbit of carriers largely confined to the Cotswolds.[40]

Some carriers operating similar routes to a series of villages

35. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 436–438 checked with village entries for all parts of the directory and with Wright's *Directory* (1897), pp. 671–673.
36. Everitt, 'Town and Country in Victorian Leicestershire: the Role of the Village Carrier', p. 226; Cracknell, 'Nottinghamshire Country Carriers in the Late Nineteenth Century', pp. 79–81.
37. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 436–438 checked with village entries for all parts of the directory and with Wright's *Directory* (1897), pp. 671–673.
38. *Ibid*. The population figures in this paragraph are taken from the 1891 census.
39. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Glos. section, p. 139; Wright's *Directory* (1897), p. 673.
40. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 436–438.


Key to villages east of Bristol
1 St.George
2 Two Mile Hill
3 Kingswood
4 Warmley
5 Bridgeyate
6 Hanham
7 Longwell Green
MOUTH OF THE SEVERN
BRISTOL
Oldbury-upon-Severn
Littleton-upon-Severn
Elberton
Aust
Olveston
New Passage
Redwick
Pilning
Tockington
Almondsbury
Easter Compton
Over
Patchway
Winterbourne
Henbury
Filton
Westbury on-Trym
Hambrook
Frenchay
Shirehampton
Portishead
Portbury
Pill
Abbots Leigh
Leigh Woods
Tickenham
Wraxall
Clevedon
Nailsea
Flax Bourton
Long Ashton
West Town
Backwell
Barrow Gurney
Brockley
Lulsgate Bottom
Yatton
Cleeve
Winford
Chew Magna
Redhill
Congresbury
Wrington
Butcombe
Chew Stoke
Stanton Drew
Langford
Sandford
Banwell
Churchill
Rickford
Blagdon
Burrington
Ubley
Bishop Sutton
Clutton
Star
Woodborough
Winscombe
Sidcot
Shipham
Compton Martin
West Harptree
Hinton Blewitt
East Harptree
Litton
Cheddar
Chewton Mendip


New Berkeley
Woodford
Stone
To
Cirencester
Falfield
Wotton-under-Edge
Tetbury
Tresham
Leighterton
Cromhall
Common
Hillesley
Wickwar
Hawkesbury
Upton
Didmarton
Malmesbury
Hawkesbury
Sherston
Horton
Nibley
Yate
Chipping Sodbury
Badminton
Coalpit
Heath
Old Sodbury
Westerleigh
N
Mangotsfield
Hinton
Staple Hill
Puckle
church
Dyrham
Doynton
Marshfield
Wick
Oldland
Bitton
Keynsham
BATH
Burnett
Marksbury
Farmborough
Timsbury
Camerton
Paulton
BRISTOL CARRIERS'
ROUTES 1897
SCALE 1:250,000
0 Km 5 10 15
0 Miles 5 10

divided their calls throughout the week. Joseph Saint travelled with his horses and van to Redhill, Rickford and Blagdon from the Hope and Anchor on Monday, Thursday and Saturday: Jacob Lyons operated an identical route from the same inn on Tuesday and Friday. Similarly, James Panes ran a service to and from the Hope and Anchor via Winford, Chew Stoke, East and West Harptree, Compton Martin and Ubley on Monday, Thursday and Saturday: Francis Payne offered the same service on Tuesday and Friday. But such co-operation did not always exist; some carriers obviously competed with one another for business. For example, John Samuel Gough and Amos Watkins both followed identical routes from the Full Moon Inn to Filton, Patchway, Almondsbury, Tockington, Olveston, Elberton and Littleton-upon-Severn on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. For Almondsbury there was even a third carrier called Williams operating on the same days; and all three men left Bristol between 4 and 5 p.m.[41]

All except one of the carriers fitted their journeys into a single day. This inevitably meant that they had long working hours. Thus the two carriers living at Ubley left the village at 7.30 a.m. and began the return trip from Bristol at 4.30 p.m.[42] Much of the time was spent travelling. Horses dragging heavy loads in the vans could only proceed at walking pace and cover a few miles every hour. The carriers' journeys from Bristol to Blagdon in the 1880s often took three-and-a-half hours to cover twelve miles, while the trip from Winterbourne through various places to Bristol took nearly three hours to travel six miles.[43] Travelling in winter was frequently cold and arduous; darkness fell by mid-afternoon; there were no lights on smaller roads; there was usually just a flickering candle aflame in the carriers' van; and stops were required at blacksmiths' forges when snow nails needed to be replaced in horses' hooves.[44] But at all times of the year the journey was tricky, for many roads were not tarmacked and consisted simply of stone bound with dust and water sprayed with a film of tar. And though the terrain was generally fairly flat or gently undulating, there were hilly stretches that were exhausting for carriers and their horses – as on the routes over Tog Hill through Wick to Marshfield and up Rownham Hill from Bristol towards Pill.[45]

Two carriers conducted business from the Grand Hotel in Broad Street and one operated from a streetside location in Small

41. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
42. *Ibid.*, Somerset section, p. 422.
43. *Ex inf.* Mr. Smith and Mr. Cohen.
44. *Ex inf.* Mr. Williams.
45. *Ex inf.* Mr. Jefferies.

Street. All the rest maintained stations at Bristol inns.[46] There were 498 hotels, inns and taverns in Bristol in 1897, or one public house for every 445 city dwellers.[47] Thirteen out of the 498 were used by carriers as essential places for providing stabling, oats and water for the horses, the exchange of news, and convenient rendezvous points for picking up parcels and passengers. The carriers' inns were situated near to busy shopping areas on major roads. Those in Old Market Street stood on the widest thoroughfare in the city, a natural link between Bristol and its industrial suburbs to the east, while those in Thomas Street were clustered along the main road leading south from Bristol Bridge and the centre of the city. Many of these inns had long been connected with horse-drawn traffic. The Full Moon in North Street, located on probably the second oldest site in the city, had been a coaching inn and a terminus for carriers' carts since at least the seventeenth century.[48] The Hope and Anchor on Redcliff Hill had an archway leading to a fairly extensive yard which could accommodate many horses and carts. A similar hostelry was the Three Kings in Thomas Street with its wide courtyard plus stabling for 100 horses.[49]

Apart from the Bear Yard in Thomas Street and the Talbot in Bath Street, from which carriers travelled to all parts of the Bristol region, the other carrying inns divided into those linked with Gloucestershire and those with Somerset.[50] The former included the Stag and Hounds and the White Hart in Old Market Street, the Castle and Ball in Lower Castle Street, the Hatchet in Frogmore Street, the Full Moon in North Street and the White Horse in Barr's Street. The latter consisted of the Three Kings, the Three Queens' Yard and the Wheatsheaf, all in Thomas Street, plus the Old Fox in Redcliff Street and the Hope and Anchor on Redcliff Hill. The inns serving each county were situated on both sides of the river Avon, which flows in a west-north-west direction through the heart of the city. Carriers travelling to Gloucestershire villages were connected with inns north of the Avon while those visiting places in Somerset were attached to inns south of the river. There were more weekly services to Gloucestershire (58 per cent of the total) than to Somerset.

46. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 436–438 checked with Wright's *Directory* (1897), pp. 671–673.
47. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 382–385. To arrive at this estimate, I have divided the census population of Bristol in 1891 by the number of public houses in the city in 1897.
48. Helena Eason, *Bristol's Historic Inns* (Bristol, 1982), p. 26.
49. C.F.W. Dening, *Old Inns of Bristol* (Bristol, 1943), pp. 11, 109.
50. The details in this and the next paragraph are taken from Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Bristol section, pp. 436–438.

There were variations in the number of carriers maintaining stations at particular Bristol inns. The Stag and Hounds and the Hatchet were each used by only one carrier. Other hostelries, however, were busier centres for horses and carts. Fourteen carriers were based at the Full Moon; they offered thirty-five services to twenty-two villages to the north of the Bristol urban cluster. Another busy carrying inn was the White Hart. Here there were carriers running forty-nine services to thirty-six villages to the east and north-east of the city. These two inns alone accounted for more than a quarter of the total number of village carriers trading with Bristol in 1897. There were between three and nine carriers attached to each of the remaining inns. Most of these small tradesmen stayed loyal to the inns which they adopted as their stations in Bristol: sixteen out of twenty village carriers in 1877 who were in business twenty years later were still associated with the same inns.[51]

Details about the individual carriers are difficult to find. They were humble rural folk who usually left very few records of their business activities. Nevertheless, there is material on some points of interest. Most of the Bristol village carriers in 1897 worked a full week and presumably had no spare time or inclination for extra work. Others, including three out of the four female carriers, were part-time operators who also had other employment. Of the eighteen cases where dual occupations can be established, five Bristol carriers were described in the directories as shopkeepers, two as beer retailers, two as proprietors of inns, two as farmers, another two as beer retailers and farmers, and one each as greengrocer, dairy farmer, fly proprietor, haulier, and omnibus proprietor.[52] Most of these additional occupations were connected with the licensing trade, with agricultural tasks, or with the ownership of vehicles providing related services; but this is not surprising since carriers' work impinged on all three areas.

The carriers all lived in places near Bristol, usually at one of the villages on their particular route. None of them lived in the city. John Dance, who ran a service from the Hatchet to Westbury-on-Trym, Henbury and Shirehampton, lived at Bristol House, Shirehampton – a corner shop with stables at the rear to accommodate his two horses and a cart.[53] John Thomas Slade, who operated a route from the White Hart to Hawkesbury Upton via Coalpit Heath, Nibley, Yate, Chipping Sodbury, Old Sodbury and

51. Cf. *ibid.* with J. Wright & Co's. Mathews' *Bristol Directory* (1877), pp. 392–394.
52. Kelly's *Directory* (1897), Glos. and Somerset sections, *passim*.
53. *Ex inf.* Mrs. M. Belding of Avonmouth.

The Yatton Carrier J.E. White

By courtesy of Mrs Sylvia Starr of Bedminster

Badminton, lived in the High Street at Chipping Sodbury where he had a double door entrance for his cart and stables for two horses.[54] And Henry Baylis, who was a carrier from the White Horse to Filton, Patchway, Almondsbury, Rudgeway, Alveston and Thornbury, occupied the Old Coach House, Thornbury, where he also had a saddle room and stables capable of holding four or five horses.[55]

All the carriers were familiar figures in their respective neighbourhoods: they knew local villagers well and vice-versa. Charles Price, for example, a carrier from Tetbury to Bristol, was a big man with a beard down to his chest who was known, ironically, as Whispering Charlie: when he announced his arrival at some hamlet, people were in no doubt of his presence.[56] Local folk waited by the side of the road to hand over their shopping lists when carriers such as Price stopped at their villages along the way to Bristol. The carriers then memorised or jotted down the orders in a small notebook. On the return journey goods were delivered to villagers in the early evening. Miss M.R. Isaac recalls how in the early twentieth century, when there were rarely any cars on country roads and life was much quieter than now, the return of the carrier to Chipping Sodbury could be anticipated: 'we could hear him at night come home and say "there's Slade back again"'.[57]

The everyday sight of horses and carts run by carriers in the Bristol region gradually became less frequent with the arrival of the first motor vehicles just before the First World War.[58] John Edwin White, who ran a service from the Wheatsheaf Inn to Long Ashton, Flax Bourton, Backwell, West Town, Brockley, Cleeve and Yatton from the 1880s, sold his business just before 1914: he was only interested in operating with horses and would have nothing to do with motor vehicles.[59] He was not the only carrier for whom the coming of the motor age marked the end of an era. Charles Price continued his horse-and-van service between Bristol and Tetbury until the late 1920s, but towards the end tailed off into an occasional trip for old time's sake. He did not want to shift over to motorised vans, which had begun to take over much of the local carrier's business by that time. He left a bequest in his will with a sum of money for a colleague to look after his horses until the end of their days, so that they would not be sent to Belgium as

54. *Ex inf.* Miss M.R. Isaac of Brislington, Bristol.
55. *Ex inf.* Mr. Hopkins.
56. *Ex inf.* Mr. Williams.
57. *Ex inf.* Miss Isaac.
58. *Ex inf.* Mrs. Belding.
59. *Ex inf.* Mrs. S. Starr of Bedminster, Bristol.

horsemeat: a touching testimony to his attachment to the animals that had helped to provide his livelihood.[60]

A number of Bristol carriers continued to provide a valuable service in the collection and distribution of goods until after the Second World War. By 1947 four of the carriers' inns used fifty years earlier – the Old Fox, the Wheatsheaf, the White Hart and the White Horse – were still frequented by these local tradesmen.[61] But by this time all the horse-drawn vehicles had been completely replaced by the internal combustion engine and the carrier's business was already in decline as a result of rising petrol costs coupled with the growth of retail stores in country villages.[62] In Bristol today the Full Moon and the Hatchet are the only late nineteenth century carriers' inns now standing; busy roads for carriers, such as Old Market Street, have lost much of their shopping vitality; and there are few visual reminders of the days of horses and carts. Village carriers deserve to be remembered, though, for they were a vital link between the society and economy of Bristol and its hinterland, and they were of great importance in the daily lives of thousands of rural people in the Bristol region, and throughout provincial England, in the generation before the First World War.

60. *Ex inf.* Mr Williams.
61. Kelly's *Directory of Bristol* (1947), p. 1184.
62. *Ex inf.* Mr. Hopkins.

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